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10 FITNESS MYTHS

In today's fitness world everyone is after tips and tricks in order to gain an advantage in the chase for great health. Multiple myths have surfaced over the years making promises of a quick path to becoming fit. Some of these myths have been proven to be fact and others have been proven false through scientific research. This simple paper will provide common fitness myths with brief descriptions and an opinion of my own reflecting my personal experience with each myth. I hope I am able to shed some light on current myths in today's fitness world.

1. **MYTH: "Running on a treadmill puts less stress on your knees than running on asphalt or pavement."** I have found running has the same effect on my knees no matter which type of surface I am running on. Physics will offer the simple explanation: The amount of force exerted on the knees will remain the same as the gravitational constant and your weight will remain constant when running on treadmills, asphalt or pavement.

"Running is a great workout, but it can impact the knees -- and since it's the force of your body weight on your joints that causes the stress, it's the same whether you're on a treadmill or on asphalt," says Todd Schlifstein, DO, a clinical instructor at New York University Medical Center's Rusk Institute.

The best way to reduce knee impact, says Schlifstein, is to vary your workout.

"If you mix running with other cardio activities, like an elliptical machine, or you ride a stationary bike, you will reduce impact on your knees so you'll be able to run for many more years," says Schlifstein. (1)

2. **MYTH: "If you're not working up a sweat, you're not working hard enough."** This particular myth has mixed issues for me. There have been times when I did not work up a sweat and I had one of the greatest workouts ever, and other times I can sweat a lot and leave the gym feeling like I hadn't accomplished much.

"Sweating is not necessarily an indicator of exertion," says Phil Tyne, director of the fitness center at the Baylor Tom Landry Health & Wellness Center in Dallas. "Sweating is your body's way of cooling itself."

It's possible to burn a significant number of calories without breaking a sweat: Try taking a walk or doing some light weight training. (1)

3. **MYTH: "Drinking water can help you lose weight."** I try to drink a decent amount of water and I do notice at times water will help me feel full and decrease my appetite. I have also noticed that drinking too much water leaves me filling blotted and tied to the restroom.

Fact: Many sources tout drinking copious amounts of water to be the all-curing panacea of the Gods. If you've heard that drinking lots of water improves your skin tone, or that it flushes toxins from your body, you know what we're talking about. But the fact of the matter is the evidence for such catch-all health benefits is lacking.

Doctors at the University of Pennsylvania have found that both the aforementioned "benefits" simply aren't true. Another myth is that drinking lots of water will make you less hungry. Sorry to tell you this -- you may eat less because you're too busy trucking back and forth between the bathroom and dinner table, but that's about it.

Oh, and that whole "recommended eight glasses a day" thing? This is also false. You should drink only when you're thirsty, and this is done just to replace the amount of water a healthy adult loses every day -- about four to six glasses. (2)

- 4. MYTH: "Lifting weights will make you look bulky."** I personally find this myth to be false. I perform heavy reps in exercises such as squats and dead lifts with very little increase in bulk. I find that my muscles actually have been toning up instead of growing larger.

Fact: If you've been avoiding the free weights for fear of becoming the Incredible Hulk, no need to flee anymore. When it comes to increasing muscle size, testosterone is key. Men have 20 to 30 times the more testosterone than women, which is why they can bulk up so noticeably. But for you to reach Arnold Schwarzenegger proportions would require you to do far more weight-lifting than the average woman, plus have some sort of hormone imbalance (either genetic or synthetically induced, as with steroids).

In fact, "strength training will help you lose weight faster and keep it off in the long run," notes Jeffrey Janot, PhD, an assistant professor of exercise physiology at South Dakota State University in Brookings. If you also do cardio, it'll help you retain muscle as you drop fat, as well as prevent your metabolism from slowing. So don't focus all your efforts on the elliptical machine -- some bicep curls could actually help you reach your ultimate goal. (2)

- 5. MYTH: "A higher number on the scale means you're getting fatter."** I can say this myth is for the most part false. Weight can increase if you are growing muscle and increasing muscle mass.

It depends where those pounds are coming from: fat or muscle. "The difference is the density," says Shirley Archer, a fitness and wellness educator with the American Council on Exercise. A pound of muscle takes up less space than a pound of fat. That's why it's possible to become leaner and healthier while at the same time gaining weight. "So don't be overly concerned with a specific number on the scale; it's more about how you feel," she says. (3)

- 6. MYTH: "As long as you exercise you can eat anything you want."** I struggle to maintain a clean diet of fruits and vegetables. I do notice eating healthy foods increases my ability to work out with greater intensity and duration.

"Individual metabolism determines how many calories we burn at rest and while we exercise," says Ed Ingebretsen, an American College of Sports Medicine-certified personal trainer. "If we eat more calories than we burn on a consistent basis, our bodies will

accumulate these extra calories as fat regardless of the amount of exercise that we do,” he says. So, if you were thinking of adopting Michael Phelps’s 10,000-calorie-a-day-diet because you have started running a few miles a day, forget it. (3)

7. **MYTH: “I can spot-reduce my problem areas.”** I have no way to show this myth as true or false. When I work out my legs, it seems as if the fat in my legs goes first. This myth is a hard one to clarify.

Spot-reduction is not possible unless you go for liposuction. Without such surgery, your body will draw fat from different regions at different rates depending on your genetic makeup.

If spot reduction was possible by training and diet, you'd seldom see women with lower-body fat deposits or men with big guts. (4)

8. **MYTH: “You cannot gain muscle after 40.”** As I slowly approach 40, I find it easier to stay motivated and this in turn allows me to focus on becoming fit. I am 35 and have had no issues putting on muscle mass.

Age does bring wear and tear, but at 40 you're still a training baby unless you've been a competitive professional athlete since you were a teenager. You can gain muscle despite hormonal deficiencies—it just may be a tad harder.

If you are over 40, you might want to go check your blood and run some saliva tests to rule out deficiencies. If you're deficient in some hormones, you may want to look into replacement therapy so you aren't at risk for heart disease or osteoporosis. (4)

9. **MYTH: “Squats are bad for your knees.”** I disagree with this myth. Squats are my favorite exercise. I find the pressure from squats is felt more in my hips than it is in my knees.

I don't know when this myth will die, but not only is it false that squats are bad for your knees, full squats are actually good for your knees. Unfortunately, no matter how much writing and promoting coaches like me do, the general media - and far too many personal trainers - still spout off this nonsense as fact.

Make sure to squat deep on every repetition. By deep I mean the top of your thighs should be at least parallel with the ground - preferably lower, if you have any human dignity. Do this; stay on your heels as much as you can while you're at it. Your knees will stay healthy long into old age. (5)

10. **MYTH: “Cardio is more important for fat loss than weight lifting.”** I find that the greatest moments of experienced weight loss occurred when I was heavy into the weights. Cardio has been a part of my routines; however, nothing like free weights.

Cardio is great for health reasons and you will burn calories while doing it. However your biggest concern when you are trying to lose weight is muscle loss. If you lose fat and lose muscle along with it, you have made your future ability to keep the weight off harder.

Less Muscle = Lower Metabolism.

Fat loss programs should be first about controlling the ratio of calories in/calories out, and second about doing everything in your power to prevent losing muscle. In my book, that means a good diet combined with a good weight training routine. If you have time for cardio, be my guest, but that comes third! (5)

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